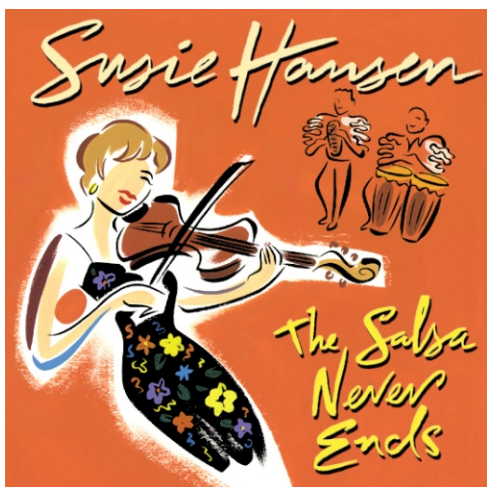


Salsa meets Jazz

Violin virtuoso Susie Hansen makes unforgettable music



Too often in the Los Angeles club scene we focus solely on strictly straight-ahead salsa bands. We forget about how salsa became what it is today and the big role that jazz played. Here in Los Angeles we have a sensational band that plays salsa and Latin jazz. A terrific violinist leads this band by the name of Susie Hansen. Listening to her on electric violin whether she is playing an Afro Cuban rhythm or jazz standard is something to appreciate.

Susie Hansen is a classically trained violinist from Chicago, Illinois. At the age of five she studied classical music with her father, who was a violinist in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Classical training is crucial to how a musician can excel in many different aspects of music. You can hear the depth of Hansen's solos because of the experience and training that she's received as a musician.

She played jazz for many years before she dwelled into anything that was Afro Cuban. In the mid-eighties she had already been a professional jazz for several years. While playing in a jazz band at Grant Park in Chicago, the bandleader of a mambo band, which was scheduled to play before them, approached her. That band had just lost its violin player so Victor Parra, the bandleader, asked Hansen to play with them. She told Victor, "I don't know anything about mambo."

Victor said, "Ah, don't worry, you'll get it."

"Well I got it," says Hansen.

She sure did. The Susie Hansen band has a very unique sound that showcases many excellent musicians from the Los Angeles area. Ricardo "Tiki" Pasillas is one of the most prominent timbales players in the Los Angeles area and is currently on tour with Marc Anthony. Bassist RenÉ Camacho is one of the most respected bass players in the salsa and Latin jazz scene. Joe Rotondi to many is the number one Latin jazz piano player on the West Coast just to name a few.

Hansen has been influenced by some of the groundbreaking orchestras like Los Van Van and Orquesta AragÜn; and has a strong influence from Alfredo De La Fe, a world-renowned Cuban violin player. Another huge influence has been her current piano player Joe Rotondi. While listening to the band or dancing to it, you can feel the chemistry that has been cultivated by the musicians love for the music.

Today it is difficult to keep the same members of a band together. So how has Hansen been able to

maintain the awesome array of musicians? She says, "The reasons we have the same musicians, is one, everybody loves playing with the band and we have really good music; second is that I spend a lot of time looking [for work] so we can afford to play with each other so people can make a living. I pay people well."

This is something that is unheard of in many Latin bands. Usually bandleaders pocket so much money and pay the musicians peanuts. Hansen is an example of how bandleaders should take care of their musicians by paying them what they deserve. Musicians need to make a living and it's good to see someone taking this new approach.

In a musician's career there are few special moments. A memorable performance for Hansen was at a time when she was new to Los Angeles and she was playing with the well-respected Bobby Matos band at the John Anson Ford Theatre. After playing a violin solo she was greeted with a huge standing ovation. "I think I will always remember that. It was kind of like my introduction to Los Angeles," says Hansen.

Currently she has just completed her second CD, which is scheduled for release on September 30. The release is titled *The Salsa Never Ends*. It has the swinging sounds of salsa, cha cha cha, and Latin jazz. In fact, the title track is one that can pack a dance floor with its infectious salsa dura.

Few bands do well with variety and Hansen is definitely a crowd-pleaser because she caters to different tastes.

"Unlike a lot of the salsa bands," she says. "we play a lot of Latin jazz. I really think that it works to have that variety. We play danceable Latin jazz. You can think of it as Afro Cuban rhythms with moÖas [an improvisational mambo like section with horns] and jazz all blended into one."

Besides entertaining listeners with its captivating music, the band can also educate people with the intertwining of different musical styles.

You can hear Susie Hansen and her sensational band every Friday at the Whittier Hilton in Whittier. Don't miss her. Susie Hansen—salsa meets jazz with a hot violin leading the way.

